

More Than 400 Families On Emergency Shelter Waitlist

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after the state abruptly opened a new overflow site in Cambridge.

During a 90-minute virtual community meeting, city and state leaders candidly explained how they selected the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds building and began welcoming families, including migrants, last Friday with little public notice or engagement. About three-quarters of families stuck on the waitlist have been directed to temporary shelter and overnight arrangements.

Officials have been scrambling to open temporary overflow sites since the shelter system hit Gov. Maura Healey's 7,500-family capacity limit in November amid a surge of new arrivals, and each day brings about 10 additional families to Massachusetts, Emergency Assistance Director Scott Rice said. When Secretary of State William Galvin offered up the east Cambridge property, Rice said his team decided in less than

a day to start fixing up the former courthouse.

"We've been very fortunate this week -- it hasn't been below freezing very much, but that is a crisis that I'm worried about," Rice said. "But when I find, and we find as a group and incident command, a location that is worthy of taking a look, we move very rapidly, as rapidly as we can. Do we do it perfectly? Do we have the most perfect community engagement plan? No, we don't."

Rice thanked city leaders, including Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui and City Manager Yi-An Huang, for their support and "friendly attitude" in navigating the unpredictable demands of the migrant crisis. Cambridge has been willing to help and "gone above and beyond on trying to solve problems," Rice said.

The forum comes months after lawmakers criticized the Healey

administration's lack of communication, including with municipalities, as more hotels in their communities began serving as emergency shelters and more migrant children began attending local schools.

In response to Healey's shelter cap, lawmakers wrote a new law requiring the administration to operationalize an overflow shelter site by Dec. 31, which is Sunday. Healey agreed to that requirement when she signed the supplemental budget that included it on Dec. 4.